

Mrs. STEWART's CASE,

WRITTEN BY HERSELF,

AND RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED TO THE

ENLIGHTENED PART OF THE PUBLICK:

INCLUDING HER

L E T T E R

T O

L O R D R A W D O N.

No more, my friends, if one of low-born race
Acts basely, shall I marvel, since the great,
Who glory in their high-trac'd ancestry,
Thus merit censure for dishonest speech.

POTTER'S SOPHOCLES. Ajax, 1100.

L O N D O N:

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M.DCC.LXXXVIII.

Mrs. S T E W A R T ' s

C A S E.

IT is, I believe, generally allowed, that for private and unimportant individuals to obtrude themselves and their personal concerns upon the publick attention, is a task at once so delicate and comprehensive, as cannot but extremely embarrass any person endued with common sensibility; even when that person may have nothing to encounter nor apprehend from prepossession or malevolence. To me, many considerations of singular moment, —former situation, and present disadvantage— render this task peculiarly arduous, and painfully affecting.

My intention is not to ingratiate vulgar opinion, which I despise; nor do I wish to conciliate the ignorant or the illiberal: too well knowing the standard of pretension which suffices for *their* favour; and that, with them, adversity is not the key which can open the door of mercy or of justice. Strangers to “the tender charities,” and hostile to whatever would challenge virtues which they do not possess, like other cowards they commence bravoës, and where they cannot *stab*, they are sure to *revile*.

From the virtuous and the discriminating I have nothing to fear: but, indeed, every liberal indulgence to hope from a generous and enlightened publick, to whose judgment I presume to appeal; and to whose beneficence I submit myself with that honest confidence which is alike remote from arrogance or distrust. Therefore, with Truth and Misfortune for my advocates, I shall proceed to state my unfortunate Case.

Those

They whose favourable opinion I am alone ambitious to propitiate, will readily excuse me for advert-
 ing as little as possible to those unhappy circumstances of past events, which would be injurious to the memory of the dead, and wound the feelings of the living. *What* were my publick sufferings, and *how* I sustained them, the world has not now to learn.

It will be recollected that, at that period, the late Sir Thomas Frankland, for obvious purposes, attempted to discredit my birth*, by pretending to question the validity of my pedigree, which fell into his hands amongst the general rapine of Harley Street House. And it will also be remembered, that, to obviate this dark, though absurd attempt, Mr. Cummyng, Record-keeper of the Lyon

* The Baronet seems to have been well aware of that respectability which is ever attendant on birth: "the advantages of which," Dr. Johnson truly observes, "are never despised but by those who do not possess them."

Office of Scotland*, officially authenticated that pedigree upon oath, before the then Lord Mayor of London; which affidavit, with a transcript of the genealogy, Sir Thomas Frankland's letter to the Lyon Office, and Mr. Cummyng's answer, were all inserted in the daily papers. Thus one of the most sinister artifices which wickedness could devise, or ignorance suggest, terminated in the Baronet's confusion.

This pedigree proves me lineally descended from Graham Earls of Monteith †, and Stewart Earls of Galloway, whose common ancestor and mine was Alexander the Sixth Lord High Steward of Scot-

* And now Secretary to the Honourable Society of Antiquaries in Edinburgh.

† This Peerage is now dormant by failure of male heirs. The co-heiress's daughters were Mary and Helen. Mrs. Stewart is the great granddaughter of Mary the elder; and Lord Rawdon the great grandson of Helen the younger. Mary married her cousin Walter Graham of Gartur, first cadet of the Monteith family; and Helen married to Sir James Rawdon: consequently Mrs. Stewart and Lord Rawdon are presumptive claimants to this dormant Peerage.

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land, father to Robert the Second, first monarch of the name of Stewart.

From my being an only surviving child, and an orphan, I am consequently without the advantage of parental or fraternal relative : yet having cousins and alliances whose opulence gives ample power of munificence, from those I might reasonably expect to benefit ; and that people high in rank, and proud of ancestry, would at least respect their own birth in me their kinswoman. But vain is the folly of hoping that the ties of affinity can engage, or the plea of misfortune avail, where callous prosperity reigns ; where the sense of humanity is stifled by fordidness ; and the pampered insolence of superior fortune leads the possessors to conceive, that they may neglect the obligations of propriety, and the duties of kindred.

Doomed, as it should seem, to be every way unfortunate, even that verdict of honourable acquittal which establishes innocence, and is, by the
united

united consent of mankind, allowed to obliterate the opprobrium of accusation, has not proved sufficient to ensure *me* this candour : for such is the extraordinary malice of my fate, or such the licentious spirit of individuals, that calumny ceased not to pursue me ; and VULGAR PREJUDICE appeared but the more envenomed by the very fact which should have silenced it for ever.

When emancipated from the horrors of a dungeon, the desolated victim of a conspiracy which plundered my property and fought my life, I returned into the world ruined, traduced, and destitute. The miseries which accompanied me may well be imagined among the severest which human calamity knows. A gentlewoman—where was my subsistence ? Would my torn mind seek peace, and cherish moralities ?—would my delicacy conceal myself from contumelious observation, and I solicit laudable establishment ?—where obtain, by what means accomplish, either ? An uncandid,

candid, and surely unjustifiable prejudice deprives me of even the common advantages of conduct and of life. Nothing absolves its remorseless stigmas and foul suspicions. Attested innocence, succeeding rectitude, nor any right, rescues from its pestilential influence, which confounds and transforms all actions and consequences to its own crooked interpretations, and rancorous depravity.

Under this oppressive dilemma have I, for years, dragged a wounded existence, cruelly embittered by a consciousness, which it might sound arrogant in me to name. Industriously hiding myself and my misfortunes, I silently and respectably endured that indigence and those evils, that would, perhaps, have excused the loudest complaints, and have extenuated latitudes of conduct, which, though inimical to virtue, she will never condemn without tears of pity.

There is a sensibility which dreads nothing more than the humiliation of coarse commiseration, or
the

the ungracious bounty that insults the distress it relieves. Therefore that want must be too evident for concealment, and too potent for human sufferance, which can prevail with me to confess my necessity, or solicit assistance.

As it would be impertinent to trouble the public with any particulars that may properly be omitted, I shall recite those incidents only that have more immediately compelled me to this publication.

In the year 1785 I voluntarily relinquished a dependence, which, consistent with my better feelings, I could no longer retain. Impoverished as this resignation left me, yet obliged to support that decent appearance of circumstances, without which neither reputation nor respect can be maintained, I necessarily became embarrassed, and contracted unavoidable debts. Impelled by these exigencies, and, I trust, a laudable desire of acquiring some honourable permanency, I determined upon a direct and pressing application to
certain

certain of my relations, who, from their least superfluity, might spare sufficient to exempt me from absolute want; and that is the utmost exertion which I should require of them.

The *received* opinion of my Lord Rawdon's character, induced me to especially expect from him a more than ordinary liberality of sentiment. I accordingly wrote to his Lordship, representing my necessities, and giving a circumstantial account of myself, my conduct, and my situation, from the period of my public misfortunes until the then present hour. I likewise empowered his Lordship to satisfy himself fully of the exact truth of what I advanced. This was an ingenuousness which I felt indispensable in seeking the friendship of a person of esteemed honour and personal worth. My Lord was then at Donington, and favoured my letter with an immediate reply, saying, "That should
 " he find my circumstances, &c. such as I had
 " described, he would be happy to render me any
 C " assistance

“ assistance in his power. But that this, as like-
 “ wise the necessary enquiries, must await his ar-
 “ rival in town : no person occurring to him at
 “ present, to whom he could entrust so delicate a
 “ commission.”

Some time thence, Colonel Hastings called upon me from Lord Rawdon with a pecuniary favour ; and if I was grateful for his Lordship’s benevolence, I was still more sensible to the grace with which it came. I endeavoured to express this, and how desirous I was, that my Lord should be convinced, that I had not sought the honour of his attention under any disguise or misrepresentation whatever. The Colonel replied, “ That I
 “ might rest assured of his Lordship’s being perfectly satisfied, otherwise he would not have
 “ sent *him*.”

I received a second obligation by the hands of the Colonel, who then said, “ That Lord Rawdon
 “ would wait upon me himself, when he heard
 “ from

“ from Lady Moira *, to whom he had written.” This was in the spring of 1786 ; and but a short time after, his Lordship generously sent to me a more considerable donation than his two former favours. A conduct so beneficent, and graced with delicacy and good breeding, must necessarily impress me with a sense of the highest gratitude, and most perfect respect. On his return to town, the following winter, I wrote a letter expressive of these sentiments, which receiving no attention, nor myself any future notice, I was naturally exceedingly piqued at such abrupt and marked incivility ; and, perhaps, rather pointedly, expressed my ideas of what I could not but deem an insult, and the more so from having been obliged to his bounty.

It was impossible for me even to conjecture what could have occasioned this change in his Lordship ; and, indeed, I felt so indignant, and held it so unworthy a conduct, that I was little solicitous of

* Lord Rawdon's Mother.

knowing, until I experienced eventual consequences too serious to be disregarded.

A first cousin whom I applied to, imploring that I might only be extricated from the impending danger of arrest, rejected my request with an almost incredible obduracy. Yet as I, nevertheless, owe him some gratitude, and esteem his good qualities, I forbear naming him.

What relations refuse, it cannot be supposed strangers will perform; and one's family withholding their aid or protection is not the only injustice which their conduct inflicts. It extends much further: it injures by example and oblique reflection. To strangers, however, with very few exceptions, do I owe every beneficence which I have experienced.

Involved, and unable to appease the importunity of creditors, I was arrested in February 1787, and thrown into prison. In this gulph of wretchedness I suffered, upwards of eleven months, the

extremes

extremes of penury, sorrow, and sickness; and that I was not totally lost, I have not to thank my relations.

My Lord Galloway, and other individuals of that family, were ineffectually written to, and remonstrated with, upon my most calamitous situation. Lord Rawdon was also informed of my distress; and it is singular enough, that at this very period, his Lordship was breathing nothing but lamentations for “the poor debtors languishing in their dungeons!” But the world has heard of words that burn—from hearts that freeze.

When the actions against me must either have run up to execution, or become superfluous, my creditors, agreeing to give time, I regained my liberty. That given time is now nearly elapsed, and I am, consequently, from that circumstance, as likewise from other debts, in hourly danger of being replunged into imprisonment.

In the early part of my confinement one fact had
taken

taken place, and latterly several incidents occurred, from which I had good reason to infer that Lord Rawdon was not merely unfriendly, but actively malevolent. It will presently appear how extensively this inference is proved.

Not having obtained my liberty by pecuniary arrangements, I left the prison more ruined than when I entered it. My debts considerably augmented by the expences incurred upon them; my health deeply impaired; and myself absolutely penniless. In this forlorn condition, I should have been literally without resort of "shelter, food, or raiment," had not the compassion of a worthy family taken me into their house, and afforded me temporary accommodations.

Those relations who had yielded neither succour nor pity to such an imprisonment as mine; who had unfeelingly known me sinking under the accumulated pressure of confinement, sickness, and famine, without a bed to repose on, or a morsel to sustain

sustain nature with *; from these people it may be thought I could not rationally expect any thing but a continuance of inhumanity.

Still there is a fond persuasion in misery, and an aptitude to hope implanted in the mind, which often leads us to presume *that* possible, which our reason would shew us the utter inconsistency of expecting. Impelled by this inherent influence, and too regardful of decorum to take any publick measure without first admonishing the parties concerned, in August last I wrote to my Lord Galloway a delicate remonstrance, and emphatick supplication: entreating that his Lordship and the family would at least exempt me from the otherwise inevitable necessity of soliciting publick charity. But this, like former addressees, has remained unnoticed.

It may be proper that I should mention my having also written to the Honourable Keith Stew-

* This was literally Mrs. Stewart's situation for many weeks, in the sick room of the prison; and, more or less so, during the whole time of her imprisonment.

art: not indeed from my own suggestion, but from accidentally speaking of my unhappy circumstances to a certain Nobleman of high birth, and yet more distinguished merit and understanding. His Lordship advised an application to Mr. Keith Stewart, whose mind and spirit were such, he thought, as promised liberality. Agreeably to this idea, I lost no time in writing; and expressed myself in terms and with sentiments that I shall never be ashamed of acknowledging.

But, instead of evincing any liberality, nay, the semblance of decency, he even condescended to dispense with the observance of common good manners; and, did it not favour too much of the honourable gentleman's own "*broadness*," I might say, that he evaded my application with something *very like* the vulgarity of a clown, the cunning of a Jesuit, and the principles of a Jew. However, what shall be said of people who, having two characters, but that, wearing them as they do their wardrobe,

wardrobe, they use one garb for *dress*, and another for *convenience*?—Happy facility of sapient adroitness! which, while it can thus pass current with the herd of mankind, let no virtue boast, nor any meanness fear to shew its head. And that worthlessness and wealth are so frequently united, is, perhaps, but merit revenged on the preposterous partiality of fortune.

The Reader will be pleased to recollect my having before said, I had good reason to conclude that Lord Rawdon had not confined himself to mere unfriendliness: it therefore became incumbent upon me to take the first opportunity of acquiring further certainty. For this purpose, two ladies, at my request, expostulated with him. His Lordship heard, with the utmost politeness, all they had to say; and when they would have urged to his humanity my unequalled distress, and besought his consideration, he peremptorily replied, “ So far from
 “ thinking it an act of humanity to serve Mrs.

D

“ Stewart,

“ Stewart, I should think that, in giving her any
 “ assistance or countenance, I was committing a
 “ *sin*, and an *imposition* upon the world. When
 “ Mrs. Stewart first applied to me, I pitied and
 “ served her, as I then believed her an injured and
 “ innocent woman in that public transaction which
 “ there is no occasion to particularize. But I have
 “ since talked with people who have entirely
 “ changed my opinion of that affair; and I have
 “ *promised*, and determined myself, never to af-
 “ ford her any assistance, directly or indirectly.”—
 These were his Lordship’s express words, repeated,
 indeed, to one of the ladies who had spoken to
 him a second time.

I was no longer at a loss for an exposition of those
 incidents which I could before but imperfectly
 read: here was the glossary which too clearly de-
 cyphered the rejection or coldness of certain per-
 sonages, who, if not insidiously prejudiced by Lord
 Rawdon, would, I am persuaded, have withheld
 neither

neither their protection nor succour. For though he could not *impose* his opinion of a transaction which, having received the decision of a court of judicature, every person was equally competent to judge of; yet the man, uncandid enough to suppose wrong, where no opportunity of proof exists—and, more especially, capable of imputing guilt, where the most sacred testimony of innocence had been found—*that* man will scarcely scruple to add falsehood to injustice; and, either by insinuation, or more open assertion, asperse and injure, whenever malice may prompt, or occasion shall serve: and, independent of such palpable proceeding, every body knows what may be done by mere implication; what a significant hesitation, an ambiguous sentence, or a dextrous equivocation, can effect. A striking instance of the latter I am authorized to state.

One of my creditors, instigated either by that ignorant impertinence so common to low people, or

influenced by the idea of obtaining his debt, went to Lord Rawdon, with the usual complaint of his “own hardship ;” and apologising for the liberty, by presuming that a relation would probably lend some assistance.—“Mrs. Stewart!!—*the Stewarts* “were not *his* family! Indeed the *woman* had “written him a begging letter, and he had, out “of compassion, relieved her; but *he* was not related to the *Stewarts*.”—Now, here was an absolute, and, from its intention, a corrupt falsehood, conveyed under the utterance of a truth; for his Lordship’s relationship and mine is by the *Grahams*, as has been already recited.—Well! my creditor, thus spoken to, and nothing doubting the word of a Lord—for who of the vulgar do, unless when the Lord chances to be in their debt?—this man, of course, supposed me the liar and impostor that his Lordship’s speech had directly given him to understand.

The story circulated ; and I was, consequently, exceedingly scandalized, and materially aggrieved in my affairs. Nor is there any saying how far such licentious defamations reach, where they may meet one, or to what extent they may injure : neither rectitude can defend from their mischiefs, nor can truth preponderate against falsehood so aimed and so managed as was this of his Lordship's ; and more particularly when, as in the present case, the defamer happens to stand on the summit of ostensibility—is of presumed honor—powerful in fortune and in friends : whilst the unhappy woman he seeks to crush, is, by misfortune and calumny, stripped of those advantages which it is his greater luck to possess.

If it should be asked what could induce Lord Rawdon to act thus, I can only answer, that I am uninformed of his motives, further than the pretence he advanced to my friends. By the following letter I have demanded an explanation, which
 though

though his Lordship has not vouchsafed to my requisition, he may possibly be less reserved, and more ingenuous, to the publick.

“ LONDON, *August 1, 1788.*

“ MY LORD,

“ AFTER having admitted the
 “ rights of relationship, received the confidence of
 “ misfortune, acknowledged my truth, and de-
 “ clared your respect for what yourself was pleased
 “ to term my “ merit and undeserved sufferings;”
 “ had you renounced these concessions of candour
 “ from any mere laxity of principle, or paroxysm of
 “ caprice, your Lordship had found in my disdain
 “ your security against notice. But the influence
 “ of a more active sentiment than tacit contempt
 “ becomes indispenfible, when, under the obvious
 “ subterfuge of unfounded change of opinion, you
 “ would defend yourself by raising the dagger of
 “ illiberality, armed in calumny, and the darker
 “ malevolence

“ malevolence of infidious imputation. Could I,
 “ in like manner, descend to the ignorance, not
 “ to say flagitioufness, of confounding accusation
 “ and guilt, I might object to your Lordship a yet
 “ fouler charge than even that with which you
 “ would stigmatize me ; a charge too from which,
 “ if the world mistake not, your Lordship stands
 “ no further exonerated than in the bare plea of
 “ military license, sanctioned by the presumption
 “ of necessity, and that sanction perhaps less in the
 “ *spirit* of right than in the *letter* of toleration :
 “ whilst my innocence has received the most un-
 “ questionable, and consequently the most ho-
 “ nourable, evincement of human testimony. We
 “ will not, my Lord, urge, we will only hint,
 “ the glaring indecency and unjustifiable import
 “ of arraigning, in your impeachment of me, that
 “ solemn verdict of justice which involved so sacred
 “ and so momentous an object as *three lives* ; but
 “ I shall take leave to remind your Lordship of
 “ your

“ your having paraded the gauntlet of mortal de-
 “ fiance, upon an insinuation that *you* had sported
 “ with *one*. Ere you presumed to traduce others,
 “ it might have been well remembered, that *they*
 “ may be of as nice sensibility, as tenacious of their
 “ honour and rectitude, as indignant of reflection,
 “ and equally entitled to render the traducer ac-
 “ countable. True, indeed! my sex protects your
 “ Lordship from personal chastisement. But if,
 “ under this impunity, insulting and aggrieving an
 “ unfortunate defenceless woman be allowable to
 “ the character of man, that praise is my Lord of
 “ Rawdon's. However, nothing ought to, nor
 “ shall, shelter him from an acknowledgment, or
 “ the alternative of his conduct being submitted
 “ to publick judgment, by which truth is ever ge-
 “ nerously received, and the oppressed protected;
 “ and by which arrogant ostentation cannot be
 “ mistaken for dignity, nor specious affectations
 “ of philanthropy be imposed for genuine benefi-
 “ cence.

“ cence. In short, your Lordship must be con-
 “ scious that I have to charge you with extreme in-
 “ humanity, unwarrantable illiberality, unbecom-
 “ ing insolence, and private injury; and I there-
 “ fore must *insist* upon your immediate and un-
 “ equivocal reasons for such conduct, as also the
 “ satisfaction of an apology, if not of repara-
 “ tion.

“ I am, my Lord,

“ Your Lordship’s humble Servant,

“ MARGARET CAROLINE STEWART.”

To LORD RAWDON.

Having given his Lordship four months for determination, I trust I cannot incur any imputation of precipitancy in now proceeding to publication.

I am entirely aware of the many disagreeable retrospections which this address may bring forward.

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And

And as nothing is more repugnant to that delicacy, or more mortifying to that laudable pride, which renders every one desirous of burying their own humiliating situations and private circumstances : so to avoid this painful disclosure, and those unpleasant retrospections, and likewise to preserve myself in unobtrusive modest obscurity, I have hitherto largely sacrificed — been dead to the world, and alive only to suffering and oppression. Yet there is a point of irresistible necessity, and of indispensable duty, which must supersede other considerations ; and such necessity is too surely mine.

I do not interest myself about what intemperate malignity may suggest, or vulgar censure shall say : for both these I perfectly understand *how* to disdain.

But to that superior and enlightened part of the Public, whom alone I regard, and to whose candour and generosity I appeal and confide myself,
I am,

I am, and ever must be, with the greatest deference, and truest esteem,

Their faithful, and

most obedient Servant,

MARGARET CAROLINE STEWART.

LONDON,
December 19, 1788.

